

## INTERVIEW - Grieving Gorbachev dreams of Raisa.

MOSCOW, Oct 20 (Reuters) - Mikhail Gorbachev still dreams vividly about his wife Raisa and is finding it hard to get back down to work after her death.

"Suddenly last night the phone rang," the 68-year-old former Soviet leader told Reuters in his first interview since Raisa's much-watched Moscow funeral last month.

"I lifted the receiver and I heard 'Hi'. It was Raisa phoning. I said to her, 'Where are you calling from?' And then the conversation ended. I woke up."

Gorbachev, moist-eyed and melancholy when speaking about his wife yet dynamic when he switches to other subjects, said his daughter Irina, a doctor, and her two daughters had moved into his dacha country house to support him.

An aide said Irina was arranging for the dacha to be partly redecorated to give Gorbachev a boost.

"They're great," Gorbachev said in the interview late on Tuesday. "They know they need to help me. Of course they are suffering. We just can't believe she is no longer there. There's still the feeling she has gone away somewhere and will return."

## RAISA'S ILLNESS WAS CRUEL BUT LIFE GOES ON

Raisa Gorbachev, whose elegance became an enduring symbol of the reforms her husband introduced in the late 1980s, died on September 20 in the German city of Muenster after a three-month battle with leukaemia. Their partnership broke the mould of programmatic Kremlin leaders and invisible Kremlin wives.

Many were deeply moved by pictures of an inconsolable Gorbachev stroking his wife's face and hair before she was buried at Moscow's elite Novodevichy cemetery on September 23.

"I understand everything, and generally I'm not a weak-willed person. But it all happened so unexpectedly. It is such a cruel illness," said Gorbachev, who spent weeks in Muenster at his wife's clinic bedside.

"I've started working and I am working, but it is not so easy, if I'm honest," he said in the interview at his Gorbachev Foundation offices in northwest Moscow. "But, well, I believe it is necessary to remember and work, work. Life goes on."

## NEXT STOP IS BERLIN FOR WALL ANNIVERSARY

Work is one of Gorbachev's favourite words, oft repeated to crowds during tours of the Soviet Union as it emerged from years of stagnation.

He is tackling a research project on globalisation and told a news conference on Wednesday he would be prepared to head a new Social Democratic party, a move that could mean he stands in December's parliamentary election.

He will embark next month on a trip to Berlin to take part in celebrations marking the 10th anniversary of the fall of the Wall - a dramatic event his own reforms helped bring about.

There, he will meet former German chancellor Helmut Kohl and former U.S. president George Bush.

"It was an expression of the will of the people, a desire that had to be met," said Gorbachev. "In this case we got it right. It demanded huge courage."

## AMBASSADOR'S CALL TOLD HIM WALL WAS OPEN

Gorbachev remains a hero abroad, particularly in Germany, but is unloved at home because of the hardships people suffered once his reforms started to bite. Yet there was a surprising wave of sympathy when Raisa died.

Gorbachev said he heard about the Wall opening when the Soviet ambassador in East Berlin telephoned him, although he said he was not surprised given the exodus to the West of thousands of East Germans through Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

"I said, tell our friends that I understand and believe they have done the right thing," the former Soviet leader said. "For them it was important. What should they have done - shoot? No, I think they did what was necessary."

"I slept normally, I did not suffer hysterics. Not at all."

(C) Reuters Limited 1999.